

House Republican Press Release

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The Cap At Your State Capitol



By State Representative John J. Ryan

If you thought that our last column (which outlined how Darien and Rowayton tax dollars fly off to Hartford to trickle back as a few cents here and there) gave you some of the unpleasant political reality in our State Capitol,

let's take a brief look at how this year's budget issues are impacted by Connecticut's spending cap.

Our state spending cap was adopted by an overwhelming 80 percent of the voters in a 1992 Statewide referendum. The constitutional spending cap was offered as a protection against runaway state spending following the imposition of the state income tax upon us that year. You may recall in those days, my distinguished predecessor as your State Representative, Reg Jones, continually pointed out to all who would listen that the state budget was increasing at double digit rates year after year, as spending chugged along unabated.

In simple terms, the cap stated the legislature cannot expand state spending (with very limited exceptions) by more than the increase in personal income, or the rate of inflation, whichever is greater. In other words, the state budget is limited to a structure of reasonable (and predictable) increases, and tax increases are accordingly kept under control.

Would you be surprised to learn that the same politicians who are calling for more tax increases (even though our area, as discussed in our last column, pays a disproportionate share of the taxes already) are complaining about the "limitations" and the "straightjacket" of the state spending cap?

If you follow the news stories from the Capitol, not only is it clear that the safety net of the spending cap is a major nuisance to many in the Democrat legislative majority, there is now an active campaign to blow a big hole in the cap in order to "maximize Federal revenue." The devious idea here is to "open" (meaning exceed) the cap by increasing taxes or fees with the idea of obtaining some Federal reimbursement for the particular item. Of course, once the cap has been slightly modified for one purpose, why not reopen and exceed it in other areas?

Since the General Assembly has already been pushing the state budget to the very edge of the current cap rules, the creation of new "exceptions" to the cap would lead to an arbitrary change in the cap rules. However, there is also an annoying little problem of violating the will of the voters in overwhelmingly adopting the cap only a little more than a dozen years ago!

Like many other topics, the aphorism that "the devil is in the details" is appropriate here; the political marketing slogan of "maximize Federal revenue" sounds harmless enough (like "campaign finance reform") until you get into the actual nuts-and-bolts about what the proposal really means. So please stay tuned, keep track of what is happening in Hartford behind the headlines and the slogans, and once again, please keep in mind that it is your government at work, and that it is your money being spent.

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.